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ABSTRACT

Shostrom (1971) has identified a type of marriage in which self-actualizing couples do not simply accept their socially defined roles, but instead develop personality traits and values that are consistent with their own psychological health and that of the couple relationship. Antill (1983) found evidence for the importance of high scores in femininity in relation to self-reported marital adjustment for both men and women. To further examine key qualities in satisfying, long-term marriages, sex-role self-concepts, marital adjustment, and self-actualization were assessed in 107 couples with long-term marriages. Subjects completed the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), and a short marital adjustment scale devised by Locke and Wallace. The results indicated the marital adjustment was positively related to BSRI femininity scores for both males and females. The BSRI femininity score was positively related to aspects of personal development for both sexes as measured by the POI. Significant correlations between femininity scores and personal development were more numerous for males than for females. These findings suggest that feminine or expressive traits such as concern for the welfare of others are a factor in marital adjustment for both males and females. (NRB)

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Sex-Role Self-Concepts, Marital Adjustment, and Self-Actualization in Long-Term Marriages

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Abstract

Subjects were middle-class couples in 107 long-term marriages (M = 21.93 years married). The relationship of self-actualization according to the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), sex-role self-concepts using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), and self-reported marital adjustment using a shortened scale devised by Locke and Wallace, for men and women were examined. Marital adjustment was positively related to BSRI femininity scores for both males and females. The BSRI femininity score was positively related to aspects of personal development (POI) for both sexes. Significant correlations between femininity scores and personal development were more numerous for males than for females. Comparisons were made with Antill's (1983) study on the relationship between femininity and marital adjustment.

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Many married couples, according to Shostrom (1971), settle into a routine and accept their well-defined roles while other married couples risk being themselves and create marriages based on personal honesty and genuine communication. These married couples form a "rhythmic" relationship, which allows the couple to reveal the various sides of their personalities. Such couples have developed an interdependent relationship, with each partner concerned with the personal growth of the other rather than with performing their respective roles. Shostrom reports these self-actualizing couples develop personality traits and values that are consistent with their own psychological health and that of the couple relationship regardless of the dictates of society.

In order to investigate qualities characteristic of a self-actualizing person, Shostrom developed a measure, the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), that measured areas important to personal development and interpersonal interaction. In the present study, the relationship between self-actualization and self-reported marital adjustment for men and women in stable, long-term marriages was examined.

Antill (1983) found evidence for the importance of high scores in femininity in relationship to self-reported marital adjustment for both men and women. Using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), the happiness of the husband was positively related to the wife's femininity score and the happiness of the wife was positively related to the husband's femininity score. Couples in which both partners scored high on femininity were shown to be far happier than were couples in which at least one of the partners was low on this dimension. In Antill's study, masculinity was unrelated to happiness - either one's own or one's partner's. Antill thus supports the idea that establishing an intimate relationship with another person or caring for a child requires affection, warmth, and concern for the well-being of another. These are qualities commonly perceived as feminine and here seem to be the key to successful relationships.

It has also been found in research with college populations (Antill and Cunningham, 1979; Spence, 1975) that masculinity is positively and strongly related to self-esteem for males and females, whereas femininity is negatively or not related to self-esteem for females. Thus, although masculine traits may be the key to self-confidence, achievement and leadership, these traits do not appear to be key qualities for a satisfying long-term marriage.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the key qualities in a satisfying long-term marriage. It includes (a) testing Antill's (1983) findings on the relationship between femininity and marital adjustment with a U.S. sample of couples in long-term marriages and (b) determining the relationship of personal development (Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory, POI, 1965) to marital adjustment and sex-role self-concept.

Method

Subjects

The subjects who volunteered for the study were 107 married couples from middle class suburban communities within a 50 mile radius of New York City and from a medium size city in upstate New York.

Materials

The questionnaire packet was entitled "A Study of Marriage" and included (a) a demographic questionnaire that elicited marital history, members included in the present family, and socioeconomic level; (b) a short, marital adjustment scale (Locke and Wallace, 1959) measuring the extent of agreement or disagreement between self and spouse on a number of common marital issues (e.g., finances, recreation, sexual relations, household tasks, etc.), and (c) the shortened version of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (1981). The BSRI treats femininity and masculinity as two indepen-

dent dimensions rather than as two ends of a single dimension, thereby enabling a person to indicate whether she or he is high on both dimensions ("androgynous"), low on both dimensions ("undifferentiated"), or high on one dimension but low on the other (either "feminine" or "masculine"). Respondents rate themselves on 10 masculine, 10 feminine, and 10 neutral adjectives using a seven-point scale in each case. These items were selected as feminine or masculine on the basis of cultural definitions of sex-typed social desirability and not on the basis of differential endorsement by males and females. A characteristic qualified as feminine if it was judged to be more desirable in American society for a woman and it qualified as masculine if it was judged to be more desirable for a man. The research battery also included Shostrom's (1968) POI, a measure of self-actualization. Eleven POI subscales measured the degree to which one's attitudes and values compare with those of self-actualizing people. The support scale measures whether an individual's mode of reaction is characteristically "self" oriented or "other" oriented. "Self" or "inner" directed individuals are guided primarily by internalized principles and motivations while "other" directed persons are significantly influenced by their peer group or other external forces. The time scale measures the degree to which the individual lives in the present as

contrasted with the past or future. Scores on each of the other subscales reflect certain aspects important in the development of self-actualization. The subscales measure self-actualizing values, flexibility in application of values, sensitivity to a partner's needs and feelings, free expression of behavioral feelings, high self-worth, acceptance of self in spite of weaknesses, perception of man as essentially good, perception of the opposities of life as meaningfully related, acceptance of feelings of anger and aggressions, and capabilities for warm interpersonal relationships.

Procedure

Names and telephone numbers of potential respondents were obtained from local church directories. Potential respondents were contacted by telephone to ask them to participate in a study on couples, and to set up an appointment to deliver the questionnaire packet. Both partners were required to participate. In 9% of the couples contacted, one member refused to participate.

Instructions were developed from an earlier questionnaire used by Terman (1938) and were designed to protect the privacy of the respondents. The unmarked sealed packets were delivered and picked up the following night.

Results

Description of Sample

According to criteria designed by Coleman and Rainwater (1978), the sample was identified as spanning the lower-middle class, 14.15%; the middle-middle class, 45.28%; and the upper-middle class, 40.57%. The men in the sample were high school graduates (32.08%), had some college (43.40%), or had four or more years of college (24.52%). The women in this sample were high school graduates (19.7%), had some college (38.3%), or had completed four or more years of college (42%).

The majority (60%) were married between 15 and 25 years with the mean 21.93 years. In this sample, 2% of the couples had been married before. The mean number of children per couple was 2.7 with a range from zero to six. Ten couples reported no children.

Sex-Role Scores of Sample

Scores of the BSRI were calculated as T-scores which permitted comparisons with Antill's (1983) study and also permitted direct comparison with Bem's group norms. The present sample produced scores that approximate Bem's (1981) norms. The total sample of males and females (N = 214) were used to determine means for the masculine T-score ($\underline{M}$ = 51.48) and the feminine T-score ($\underline{M}$ = 53.48).

Antill's Australian population was characterized by scores that are about one standard deviation above the norm

(Bem, 1981). For example, his median masculinity T-score was 57.6 and his median femininity T-score was 67.4

Correlations with Sex-Roles

Table 1 shows correlations of femininity, masculinity and marital adjustment for both males and females with sex-role self-concept, level of self-actualization on 11 POI subscales, the amount they contribute to the family income, length of marriage, and number of children. For both females and males, femininity was significantly correlated with marital adjustment. For males, masculinity also was significantly correlated with marital adjustment.

In this study, as the length of marriage increased for both males and females so did their self-rating of femininity but not masculinity. For females, masculinity was positively correlated to the amount they contributed to the family income; for males, masculinity was correlated to number of children.

Table 2 illustrates the correlation coefficients for marital adjustment and femininity between couples and compares these to Antill's findings. In this study the correlations between husbands' and wives' marital adjustment scores were slightly greater than in Antill's study. The correlations between wife's femininity score and husband's self-rating of marital adjustment and husband's femininity score and wife's self-rating of marital

adjustment were positive but not as strong as Antill's. In this study there were no significant correlations for femininity scores between the couples, but in Antill's study femininity scores between couples were significant. In general, however, the present pattern replicates Antill's (1983) findings.

Correlations with Personal Development

Three POI subscales, time competence, self-regard and self-acceptance, were significantly correlated with marital adjustment for both males and females. Shostrom defines time competence as the ability to live in the present. Therefore, a partner in a marriage who can recognize and work with the other person's most pressing needs should be better able to give and receive satisfaction in a marriage. Self-regard, according to Shostrom, is high self-worth. A partner who regards oneself highly may not be so dependent on the marital relationship to provide satisfaction and sources of self-esteem. In addition, Shostrom relates self-acceptance as accepting one's self in spite of weaknesses. This acceptance allows a partner to accept help from another without reacting defensively. Also, a self-accepting person does not need a partner to build one up unrealistically promoting honest interpersonal communication.

For both males and females in seven POI subscales, masculinity was positively correlated to self-actualization.

For males, masculinity was correlated to two additional POI subscales. Femininity for males was positively correlated to five POI subscales; for females, femininity was correlated with one POI subscale. Thus masculinity was significantly and positively correlated with personal development for both sexes, but the correlations with femininity were more numerous for males than for females.

Multiple Correlations to Marital Adjustment and Sex-Role Development

In this study, multiple correlation analysis using SAS PROC STEPWISE to predict marital adjustment were carried out separately for both sexes. For the women, only femininity predicted marital adjustment. For the men, femininity also was a predictor of marital adjustment. In addition two of the POI subscales, self-regard and inner directedness contributed to marital adjustment.

Discussion

The femininity scores and correlations demonstrate, as hypothesized, that feminine or expressive traits such as concern for the welfare of others are a factor in marital adjustment for both males and females. Multiple correlational analysis also supported this result. These findings support Antill's (1983) Australian study, although the population in the present study consisted of couples from a different culture and in long-term marriages (Antill $\underline{M}$ = 11 years vs. present study $\underline{M}$ = 21.93 years).

In the present study, three correlations of marital adjustment with POI scales - living in the present, knowledge of one's self-worth, and acceptance of one's faults - were shared between males and females. These three scales represent the ability to respond immediately and without the marital partner to boost one's self-esteem and the ability to accept one's partner with high regard. It is not surprising that these characteristics are correlated with the perceived quality of the marital relationship.

Further, masculinity scores were positively related to personal development (POI) for both males and females. Femininity scores also were positively related to personal development for males in the study but less so for females. These results contradict Antill's (1979) finding that femininity was unrelated to personal development for both sexes. It is difficult to determine if these discrepancies are related to cultural differences in the population in the two studies or to the scales used. In this study, personal development scores were more numerous for males than females. Abraham, Feldman, and Nash (1978) suggest that women are required to make greater behavioral changes than men for the sake of the family. When children are present, mothers generally have more responsibility and less freedom. More than 90% of the couples in this study were

parents. Perhaps suburban women in these stable first marriages may still be constrained from developing the full range of their potential. Future research might explore the question of why some of these women expand their roles and why others do not.

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Table 1

Correlation of Gender-Role Self Concept, Marital Adjustment, POI, Contribution to Family Income and Marital Data

Scale	Females			Males		
Score	Marital Adj.	Fem.	Masc.	Marital Adj.	Fem.	Masc.
Gender-Role Self Concepts (BSRI)						
Femininity	.21**	--	--	.32****	--	--
Masculinity	.00	.10	--	.15	.37****	--
Marital adjustment	--	.21**	.00	--	.32****	.36****
POI						
Time Competence	.19**	.02	.04	.23**	.31****	.18**
Inner directed	.09	.06	.29***	.09	.14	.28***
Self-actualizing value	.05	.13	.37****	.19*	.28***	.49****
Existentiality	-.05	-.03	.02	.03	-.03	.03
Feeling reactivity	.00	-.08	.27***	.04	.08	.27***
Spontaneity	.09	.08	.33****	.09	.26****	.28****
Self-regard	.23	.19*	.36****	.30****	.31****	.49****
Self-acceptance	.19*	.03	.02	.05	.05	.02
Nature of man. constructive	.05	.06	.12	.14	.21	.26****
Synergy	.09	.09	.33****	.14	.26***	.28***
Acceptance of Aggression	.00	.06	.47****	.00	.12	.34****
Demographic Variables						
Contribution to family income	.05	-.15	.31****	.03	-.14	.05
Length of Marriage	.10	.19*	.13	.03	.22**	-.02
No. of Children	.06	.09	.11	.04	.12	.20**

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.005
****p<.001

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients for Marital Adjustment and Femininity Between Couples

	Wife	
Husband	Marital Adj.	Femininity
Marital Adjustment	.66***[a] .59***[b]	.20*[a] .28**[b]
Femininity	.25**[a] .31***[b]	.07[a] .20*[b]

[a]Present study (N = 214)

[b]Antill's (1983) study (N = 216)

*p<.05
**p<.005
***p<.001